

The Wonder of Jesus
The Challenge of His Sayings

Lesson #6 for May 10, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 5:48; 18:21,22; 19:3-12; Luke 12:32-34; John 6:25-71; John 19:25-27.

1. In addition to His major teachings, Christ made a number of individual statements, or sayings, that challenge us. This lesson focuses on a number of those challenging sayings.
2. For example, what did Jesus mean when He said, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too"? (Matthew 5:39, *GNB*; see also Luke 6:29) How are we supposed to relate to people who do evil things? Are we supposed to encourage them? Are we supposed to let them "get away with it"? Shouldn't we do everything possible to resist evil? (James 4:7)
3. What did Jesus mean when He told us to love our enemies? (Matthew 5:43-45) Are we supposed to love people who take advantage of us? By definition, aren't enemies supposed to be hated? Is it always possible to "destroy" our enemies by turning them into friends?
4. Are we really supposed to love outcasts, prostitutes, and other sinners more than we love the "righteous"?
5. One of the amazing statements made by Jesus which has challenged Christian thinkers for two millennia is found in Matthew 5:48. What did He mean when He said, "You must be perfect—just as your Father in heaven is perfect"? (*GNB*) Can the problem be solved by a reinterpretation of the original language? Goodspeed translated this passage: "You are to be perfect!" Is that a command or a promise? Was Jesus trying to set an impossible standard? By looking back at the original language and the context, scholars have suggested that Jesus was telling us to "grow up," to be kind, and to be merciful. And He was saying to do so without regard to the recipients of our kindness and mercy. Is that possible for human beings?
6. In what sense are those who mourn, those who are pure in heart, and those who exhibit mercy toward others "blessed" in this life? We tend to think that "the blessed" are those who have money, are powerful in business or government, or who have a high degree of education. Would you rather be mourning or have good looks and plenty of friends?
7. Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4. On what grounds do you think the Lord allows divorce? The Jewish rabbis before the days of Jesus were divided strongly on that question. The followers of the Rabbi Shammai were very strict and permitted divorce only in the case of adultery. On the other hand, the followers of Hillel permitted divorce for a number of reasons, including some which were very insignificant. That left the door open for people to more or less choose what they wanted to do and they could still claim rabbinic authority for it!
8. Read Matthew 5:31,32. What is a woman's "unfaithfulness"? Some have even suggested that this is a reference to certain illegal marriages described in Leviticus 18:6-18 or Numbers 25:1. Those marriages would be considered by many in our day as incest.
9. Why do you think even His disciples were apparently shocked when Jesus said that divorce was acceptable only on the basis of adultery. In their male-oriented society, they believed that it was safe to marry only if you had an easy "escape hatch"!
10. But if that seems like a difficult statement, look at Jesus' response! Read Matthew 19:11,12. What was Jesus talking about? Compare 1 Corinthians 7:1-9. Was Jesus suggesting that a

person must be “mature” to be married? Are people who are born with some sexual deformity never supposed to marry? Is there ever a reason for a person not to marry “for the sake of the kingdom of God”?

11. Was Jesus suggesting that those who had gotten divorced were “hard-hearted”? Is the standard He sets too high? What do you think Jesus intended for us to learn from those two passages of Scripture? If we do not believe that we can understand them fully, is that a basis for leaving them out of the guidance which we choose to follow?
12. There is a group of people who are critical scholars working in our world today who have taken apocryphal writings from others in the days of Jesus and use them to judge and critique the Gospels. They take as a general principle the idea that Jesus could not have stated anything that was too far removed from the normal beliefs of the people in His day. Incredible as it might seem, they call themselves the “Jesus Seminar.” Many of the most incredible statements by Jesus that we regard as truly inspired, they reject as not being in any way from Jesus because they are “too much out of harmony” with the common beliefs of His day. Is that a valid method for judging Scripture?
13. No doubt, all of us have heard sermons on the “seventy times seven” times that we are to forgive others if they “wrong us.” (Matthew 18:22) What was the point that Jesus was making? Does that include the horrendous sins that we read about in the newspaper today? Should serial killers, serial rapists, those who commit incest, child molesters, etc. be forgiven “again and again and again”? If we forgive them, do we treat them as if they had not done anything wrong? Does that “give them permission” to continue such sins?
14. We must remember that Jesus prayed for God to forgive the people who were crucifying Him! (Luke 23:34) Doesn’t that imply that He had already forgiven them Himself? Does being forgiven indicate that one is saved? Should we as individuals and as a group forgive Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Idi Amin? And if we forgive them, does that mean we give them permission to carry on their horrendous atrocities?
15. Some of Jesus’ sayings have interesting theological implications. Read John 6:53-56. Would you have been among the group that considered this saying “too hard”?
16. In the early centuries of Christianity, Christians were accused of being “cannibals” because of that statement and the application of that statement to the Lord’s Supper.
17. How do you generally react to some of these more challenging sayings? Do you respond as suggested by the *Teacher’s Guide*? Do you:
 - a) Admire them as the musings of an idealist; b) Dismiss them as setting standards too high for any mortal to reach; c) Take what agrees with you and ignore the others; or d) Accept them as the principles of His kingdom and seek His empowerment to follow them. *Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 69.
18. We know that in Jesus’ day the poor were considered to be “cursed.” The Jews were certain that if one was righteous, God would bless him; and if God was blessing a person, he would be wealthy. So, what did they think when Jesus said, “Blessed are you poor”? (Luke 6:20) In what sense could the poor be considered to be blessed? Does anyone who is not poor pray for the opportunity to be poor? Don’t we spend our lives working hard so as not to be poor? Should such statements by Jesus be taken as realistically impossible but intellectually

challenging?

19. Read Luke 12:32-34 and 18:22. What does it mean to “put your treasure in heaven”? Is that just a clever way of saying that our “hearts” must be focused on heaven? Or did Jesus really have in mind some practical application? Read Luke 12:33. If every Christian did that, what would happen?
20. Was Jesus recommending a total redistribution of wealth among all Christians? In this political season, a plan of that type seems to be the goal of some politicians. If Christians did that literally, how would they provide for their families? Or provide for their retirement? Even the “forwarding” of the gospel after their money is gone?
21. Do we take comfort in the following facts? 1) Judas carried money on behalf of the disciples? 2) Jesus and His disciples were supported by a group of wealthy women? (Luke 8:1-3) 3) While the early Christian church seemed to develop some kind of communal living program, it was carried out in a very orderly way and seemed to work well; but it did not seem to continue very long. 4) We do not have any evidence that Peter, Paul, or any of the other early apostles for whom we have records telling their new converts to sell everything. Paul worked hard to support himself and his associates as they spread the gospel. In that respect, it is even more troubling to recall the fact that most of the heroes of the Old Testament were wealthy! How many really poor people are even mentioned in the Old Testament?
22. The list of challenging sayings goes on! Some of the sayings are literally impossible. Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again!” (John 3:3) We, of course, give this not a literal but a spiritual interpretation. Is that what we are supposed to do with some of those other sayings?
23. What does it mean to “take up your cross and follow Jesus”? (Luke 14:27) Why would He seem to suggest that “cross-bearing” is the only way to enter heaven? Crosses were for traitors!
24. Read Matthew 7:7-11 and compare Luke 11:9-13. How are we to apply this “Golden Rule”? Are we to select people who might in one way or another benefit us by something they could do and then be nice to them, hoping they will return the favor? Or was Jesus not talking about material things at all but rather about the Holy Spirit? Does the Holy Spirit have something to do with the Golden Rule? In our usual circumstances today, the “Golden Rule” often means, “He who has the gold makes the rules!”
25. Jesus challenged us to place Him and His business as top priority in our lives even over parents, children, or other relatives. Is that a serious possibility? How does that fit with the fifth commandment? (Exodus 20:12)
26. Mark Twain once suggested that what bothered him most about the Bible was not the things that he could not understand but the things that he could! Do we sometimes feel the same way?
27. David Koresh in the 1990s told a young woman who was a part of his community not to go home to Canada to assist her family when her mother passed away. In our ordinary human ways of thinking, family should take top priority. Why do you think Jesus demanded ranking Himself even higher than our family?
28. Think how things might have been different if Jesus had always done what His mother and His brothers wanted Him to do! In His earlier years, they seemed bound and determined to make Him conform to the customs and requirements of His day. Was that partly the explanation for why Jesus spoke as He did about family members?
29. Why do you think Jesus’ brothers—and perhaps His sisters as well—seemed to go over to His

side after He was dead and gone? What changed their minds?

30. When Jesus said that we are to “hate” father and mother or even other relatives, we need to note that the word “hate” in the Bible—as in Luke 14:26—often simply means “to love less.” (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 811)
31. If we have to choose, does that mean we should always choose Jesus as opposed to even our closest family members?
32. Look over the life of Jesus as you remember it. Why was it that He so often seemed to be in opposition to established leaders, the rich, even the powerful? Why did they find Him offensive and a disturber of the peace? Have you ever felt that way about Jesus and His sayings or teachings?
33. Some have suggested an interesting challenge: “Show me a Christian, and I will become one!” Is it really virtually impossible to completely live “the Christian life” including “following” all of these sayings? Think about the sayings that we have discussed this week. Do you know anyone who has literally followed any of them? Is that why we are not yet in the kingdom?
34. What would happen in our world today if Christians actually tried to: 1) Discover the true meaning of Jesus’s teachings and 2) Actually follow His advice?
35. How do these challenging sayings relate to our understanding of the “great controversy”? Do you think of some of these things as being easy to apply when we get to heaven but impossible here? Does the Devil rejoice as he sees us “interpreting away” the true meaning of some of these statements? What would happen if a group of Christians, even Seventh-day Adventist Christians, decided to follow Christ’s sayings in every aspect of their lives?
36. Do those of us who espouse the “Larger View” tend to ignore some of the very practical teachings and sayings of Jesus because we are so busy thinking about the “big issues” like “Why did Jesus have to die?” and “What is Jesus doing now in the heavenly sanctuary?”

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